

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

contact: Marcia McBrien | (313) 972-3219 or (517) 373-0129

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LINKING FOSTER CHILDREN TO COMMUNITY SUPPORT IS GOAL OF NEW MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT PROGRAM; ADVISORY COMMITTEE NAMED

LANSING, MI, November 23, 2004 – The Children’s Community Support Network (CCSN), a new initiative of the Michigan Supreme Court, will help link volunteers with opportunities to help foster children, Chief Justice Corrigan and CCSN Program Manager Randall J. Wilger announced at a press conference early today.

Speaking from the Oakland County Circuit courthouse in Pontiac, where the court was celebrating Michigan Adoption Day, Corrigan said, “It is fitting that we announce CCSN on Michigan Adoption Day, because we need to find help and support for all those children and youth who will not be adopted.”

Corrigan and Wilger said the inspiration for CCSN came from people who expressed a desire to help foster children, but who were unable or unwilling to adopt.

“Of course we would like to see all foster children adopted,” Corrigan said. “We held the first Michigan Adoption Day in 2003 to let the public know that there are children in the state who are available for adoption and who need permanent, loving homes. But as I traveled around the state and spoke about adoption and foster care, I found many people who wanted to help, but just were not in a position to adopt a child. At the same time, we have hundreds of foster children in Michigan who are aging out of the system every year and who are in great need of adult guidance and support. We could not just throw up our hands for these unadopted children -- we had to find other ways for people of good will to help.”

Wilger, a former volunteer member, director, and chairman of the Foster Care Review Board, was named Special Assistant on Volunteerism to Corrigan in September. He said CCSN’s mission is to help children and young adults who are or were court wards become productive and responsible adults by providing them with a network of community support.

“There is a misperception that the only way to help foster children is to adopt them, which many people are not able or willing to do,” Wilger said. “We have a great, untapped resource in people who want to help foster children in other ways, whether by mentoring or financial support, or by providing respite care to help foster and adoptive parents. CCSN’s goal is linking those people of good will with volunteer opportunities. In as little as an hour a month, you can make a difference for foster children.”

Wilger added that volunteer support is critical, especially for older foster children. “As a matter of statistics, after age 11, a child’s chances of being adopted are very slim,” he said. “Many of these young people will simply ‘age out’ of the foster system and will be on their own by age 18 or 19 without a family or support network. Our goal is to put these children and youth in touch with those who can help them, including potential mentors.”

Statistics indicate that over half of former foster youth will find themselves back in the legal system within two years of “aging out.” Other information indicates that these youth are at high risk for substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, crime, and poverty.

Wilger said that there is a wide variety of ways to help foster children.

“I’ve already had requests for ‘hobby coaches’ who can teach foster children, for example, how to golf, garden or do woodworking,” he said. “If you can serve as a mentor, wish to make a financial donation, are willing to offer pro bono professional services, even can donate a few hours to help paint a foster facility waiting room, we can link you with an opportunity to do that. We’ve had a request for someone who can give haircuts and hairstyling advice. Whatever your skill set, we’ll find a match for you!”

Those interested in volunteer opportunities and other information may contact Wilger at ccsn@courts.mi.gov or can call 517-373-5322. Information is also available on CCSN’s website at <http://courts.michigan.gov/supremecourt/CCSN/index.htm>.

Corrigan and Wilger also announced that an advisory committee has been named to offer input for the program. The advisory committee members are:

Honorable Maura Corrigan, Chief Justice, Michigan Supreme Court
Michael Foley, Assistant Director, Child Welfare Services, Michigan Supreme Court
Carol Goss, President and CEO, Skillman Foundation
Honorable Mary Beth Kelly, Chief Judge, Wayne County Circuit Court
Jessica Lindsay, Former foster child
Rev. Michael Nabors, Senior Pastor, New Calvary Baptist Church, Detroit
James Novell, Program Representative, Foster Care Review Board Program, Michigan Supreme Court
Kathryne O’Grady, Director, Child Welfare Services, Michigan Supreme Court
Robert Parks, Director of Membership Services, Michigan Association of United Ways
Sharon Peters, President and CEO, Michigan’s Children
Verlie Ruffin, Associate Director, Michigan Federation for Children and Families
John Schmidt, President, Association of Accredited Child and Family Agencies
Honorable Leslie Kim Smith, 3rd Judicial Circuit Court
Marianne Udow, Director, Family Independence Agency

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CHILDREN'S COMMUNITY SUPPORT NETWORK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HON. MAURA D. CORRIGAN

Maura D. Corrigan is Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court. A magna cum laude graduate of Marygrove College, she earned her law degree from the University of Detroit Law School. She served as a law clerk to the Honorable John Gillis of the Michigan Court of Appeals, worked as an assistant prosecuting attorney in Wayne County from 1974 to 1979, and was appointed Chief of Appeals in the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Michigan. In 1986, she was promoted to Chief Assistant United States Attorney, the first woman to hold that position. While in that post, she supervised the criminal and civil work of 75 assistant United States attorneys. In 1989, Justice Corrigan became a partner in the law firm of Plunkett & Cooney, specializing in litigation and appeals. In March 1992, she was appointed to the Michigan Court of Appeals by Governor John Engler. In November 1992, she was elected to a partial term and then reelected in 1994 to a full six-year term. After she received the nomination of her colleagues, the Supreme Court appointed Corrigan as Chief Judge of the 28-judge appeals court and its 250 employees in 1997. She served two years as Chief Judge before her election to the Michigan Supreme Court in 1998. Corrigan was elected by her colleagues to a two-year term as Chief Justice in January 2001 and was re-elected to a second term as Chief Justice in January 2003.

Corrigan's numerous community and professional activities include serving as president of the Incorporated Society of Irish American Lawyers and of the Federal Bar Association, Detroit Chapter. She has served as Vice-President of the Conference of Chief Justices and as a member of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. She has also served as a commissioner of the Michigan Law Revision Commission, executive board member of the Michigan Judges Association, and member of the Judicial Advisory Board of the Center for Law and Organizational Economics at the University of Kansas Law School. She was a member of the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit Attorney Advisory Committee and the local rules committee of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan. She also served on the board of Boysville of Michigan. Corrigan's honors include honorary doctorates of laws from Northern Michigan University and University of Detroit-Mercy, the U.S. Department of Justice Director's Award for Outstanding Performance as an Assistant U.S. Attorney, and the Federal Bar Association's Leonard Gilman Award as the 1989 Outstanding Practitioner of Criminal Law. She has published in journals such as the Wayne Law Review and University of Toledo Law Review. She has been a faculty member at programs of the Michigan Judicial Institute, the American Bar Association Appellate Practice Institute, the Federal Bar Association, and the U.S. Department of Justice Attorney General's Advocacy Institute.

MICHAEL D. FOLEY

Michael D. Foley is the Assistant Director of Child Welfare Services of the State Court Administrative Office and statewide Manager of Michigan's Foster Care Review Program. Before joining the State Court Administrative Office, he served as the Executive Director of Children's Charter of the Courts of Michigan, a statewide child advocacy organization involved in a variety of issues related to children and Michigan's court systems.

Foley has been Michigan's State Leader for Healthy Families America, an initiative to assist communities in the development of high quality services for families with children 0 to 5 years of age. He has managed several state-level child and family initiatives, including Lieutenant Governor Connie Binsfeld's Commission on Adoption Issues and a two-year initiative of the State Bar on children in the courts.

CAROL A. GOSS

Carol A. Goss is President and Chief Executive Officer of The Skillman Foundation in Detroit, Michigan. Before coming to The Skillman Foundation in March 1998 as a Senior Program Officer, her work experience in philanthropy included serving as Program Officer at The Stuart Foundation in San Francisco, California, and Program Director at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation in Battle Creek, Michigan.

A graduate of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Goss holds an A.B. in Sociology and a Master's Degree in Social Work. She has more than 27 years experience in the human service field as a social worker, social work supervisor, and agency administrator. Her experience in this field includes child welfare, family services, and youth development. Goss is active with Grantmakers for Children Youth and Families, Association of Black Foundation Executives, and Women & Philanthropy.

HON. MARY BETH KELLY

Judge Mary Beth Kelly is Chief Judge of the Wayne County Circuit Court; she has also served as Co-Chief Judge of that court and as Presiding Judge of the court's Family Division. Kelly was appointed to the court in 1999 by Governor John Engler. She was previously a partner in the Detroit-based law firm of Dickinson Wright, where her practice included commercial litigation, particularly antitrust, telecommunication, securities fraud and class action litigation. She is a Michigan Supreme Court appointee to the Child Leadership Council of Michigan, which she serves as Co-Chair; she is also a member of the Family Division Academic Advisory Committee of the Michigan Judicial Institute, a division of the Michigan Supreme Court which provides continuing education for Michigan judges.

Kelly received her law degree in 1987 from the University of Notre Dame, where she served as managing editor of the Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy, and was a Thomas J. White Center on Law & Government Scholar. She graduated with distinction from the University of Michigan in 1984 with an undergraduate degree in political science. She has served as Executive Board Member of the Federal Bar Association and on the Civil Litigation Committee, of the State Bar of Michigan, 1997-2000. Kelly is also a member of the Detroit Bar Association, the Catholic Lawyers Society, the Downriver Bar Association, and is on the board of directors for Vista Maria Residence for Girls.

JESSICA LINDSEY

Jessica Lindsey is 19 years old, a former Wayne County foster youth, and an advocate for

foster care youth. She entered foster care as a teenager and spent three years in that system.

Lindsey is currently the president of Youth for Tomorrow's Children, which is the youth board for the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. She has served on the board for two years and was the diarist to the Initiative before becoming president of the youth board. Through the Initiative, Lindsey has spoken at events across the country on various topics related to youth in foster care, youth in the community, youth leadership, and the Wayne County Jim Casey Initiative.

REV. DR. MICHAEL C. R. NABORS

Rev. Dr. Michael C.R. Nabors is pastor of the New Calvary Baptist Church of Detroit, Michigan. His accomplishments include helping to secure nearly \$450,000 in public and private grants in the areas of health care and youth development. Nabors has served as an adjunct professor of Ashland Theological Seminary in Ohio, where he taught both Early Church History and Christian Missions. He is currently adjunct professor of Preaching for Marygrove College and Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit. Before coming to Detroit, Nabors served at Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton, New Jersey and at First Baptist Church in Princeton, New Jersey.

Nabors serves on the boards of the United Way of Oakland County, St. John's Health Systems, the Detroit Area Agency on Aging, the Political Committee of the Detroit NAACP, and the National Conference for Community Justice. He is a member of the Birmingham-Bloomfield Task Force on Race Relations and Ethnic Diversity and of the Clergy Task Force for the Skillman Foundation of Detroit. He has served as president of many organizations, including the Michigan Progressive Baptist Convention, the Princeton Clergy Association, the Trenton NAACP, and the Princeton NAACP. His honors and awards include mayoral proclamations, Joint Resolutions from the New Jersey State Senate and the New Jersey General Assembly, and over fifty awards and proclamations for community service in both New Jersey and Michigan. Nabors graduated from Western Michigan University, where he majored in English and Creative Writing. He is also a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary where he earned both Master's of Divinity and Master's of Theology degrees. Nabors earned his Doctorate of Ministry degree as a Samuel DeWitt Proctor Fellow from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

JAMES NOVELL

James Novell is a Program Representative with the Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) Program. Before joining the FCRB in March 1998, Novell worked for over 20 years as a caseworker, therapist, clinical supervisor, and executive administrator in private child welfare and mental health agencies. He has a Master's Degree in Social Work from Michigan State University.

KATHRYNE A. O'GRADY

Kathryne A. O'Grady has been involved with child welfare law for over 20 years. In 2003, the Michigan Supreme Court appointed O'Grady Director of the State Court Administrative Office's

(SCAO) Child Welfare Services. Before her appointment, O'Grady served as a juvenile section referee for the Wayne County Circuit Court Family Division, a program manager for the Michigan Child Welfare Law Resource Center at the University of Michigan Law School, and a Wayne County assistant prosecutor and defense attorney specializing in juvenile law.

O'Grady is the founding editor of the Michigan Child Welfare Law Journal and has taught several undergraduate and graduate courses, including juvenile law, criminal law, and civil rights and liberties. She is the former chairperson of the Children's Law Section and former member of the executive council of the Referees Association of Michigan. O'Grady has spoken before such groups as the Michigan Probate Judges Association and the Child Welfare Institute of the Family Independence Agency and has served as faculty for the Michigan Judicial Institute.

BOB PARKS

Bob Parks joined the Michigan Association of United Ways as Director of Membership Services in December 2000. His assignments include expanding United Way involvement in early childhood issues, after-school initiatives, the statewide summer food service program, development of the 2-1-1 dialing code, public-private funding opportunities, and public policy.

Before joining United Way, Parks had a 32-year career with the Michigan Family Independence Agency. Much of his career at FIA was in children's services; including director of two residential treatment programs for delinquent children, delinquency services supervisor, and contract manager for runaway and homeless youth programs. During his last four years at FIA, Parks worked in the Office of Volunteer Services. He received his undergraduate degree from Michigan State University in 1968.

SHARON CLAYTOR PETERS

Sharon Claytor Peters is President and CEO of Michigan's Children, a statewide, multi-issue advocacy organization that since 1993 has acted independently of government funds as a policy voice for children. She currently co-chairs the Michigan Coalition of Children and Families, an advocacy coalition of about seventy child-focused private agencies. She also serves on the Advisory Boards of the Michigan Public Policy Institute, the Michigan State University Institute for Children Youth and Families, the Skillman Center for Children at Wayne State University, the Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending and several other professional organizations. Peters was formerly a legislative liaison for AAA Michigan. She also served as Assistant Secretary of State for Michigan, on the Speakers' Policy Staff for the Michigan House of Representatives, and as Advocacy Director for the Michigan Consumers Council.

Peters' civic activities include the Lansing Board of Education, on which she served from 1994 to 2000, including two years as President. In 1999, she was named one of "100 Leaders for the Future" by the *Lansing State Journal*. In 2001, Peters was named co-chair of the Lansing City Council's Task Force on Racial Justice and received the 2002 Community Service Award from the Poverty and Social Reform Institute. She is on the Board of Directors of the Michigan Political History Society, and the Lansing Entertainment and Public Facilities Authority. A graduate of Michigan State University Honors College, Ms. Peters is a member of Phi Beta

Kappa. She also holds a masters degree in Medical Anthropology from MSU and formerly taught on the junior college level.

VERLIE M. RUFFIN

Verlie M. Ruffin is the Associate Director of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families. The Federation is a statewide membership association of child and family service providers, advocacy organizations and individuals working to protect children, build families and strengthen communities.

Ruffin holds a BA and MA Degree from Michigan State University and has over twenty years of experience in child welfare services, including special expertise in foster care, adoption, and child/family advocacy. She is a 1997 graduate of Leadership Detroit, Class XVIII and serves on a number of boards and advisory committees. She is currently Board Chair of Adult Well-Being Services and Board Treasurer of the National Association of Foster Care Reviewers.

JOHN R. SCHMIDT

John R. Schmidt is the Executive Director of Methodist Children's Home Society; he was appointed to that position in 1986. From 1978 to 1986, he was Executive Director of Penrickton Center for Blind Children in Taylor, Michigan. Before coming to Michigan, Schmidt worked in various positions for the corrections department in New Jersey.

Schmidt holds an undergraduate degree from Franklin and Marshall College, a Master's Degree from the New School for Social Research, and an Master's Degree in Social Work from Rutgers University Graduate School of Social Work. He is a member of the Academy of Certified Social Workers of the National Association of Social Workers. He is currently President of the Association of Accredited Child & Family Agencies.

HON. LESLIE KIM SMITH

Judge Leslie Kim Smith has served as a judge for almost 18 years. She is currently assigned to the Family Division of Wayne County Circuit Court, where she handles matters involving juveniles. She was appointed to the Wayne County Circuit Court in 2003 by Governor Jennifer Granholm. Before that, Smith was a judge of the 30th District Court in the city of Highland Park; she was elected to that court in 1986 and served as the court's Chief Judge for over a decade. Before becoming a judge, Smith was an Assistant Attorney General. Her professional associations include the State Bar of Michigan, Wolverine Bar Association, Michigan Judges Association, and Association of Black Judges of Michigan.

Smith attended Wayne State University and graduated with a B.A. in Economics. She received her law degree from the University of Detroit School of Law in 1982. She is a board member of Children's Charter and is also a Life Member of the NAACP.

MARIANNE UDOW

Michigan Governor Jennifer M. Granholm appointed Marianne Udow director of the Family Independence Agency (FIA) on December 10, 2003, effective January 12, 2004. The agency

directs the operations of public assistance and service programs through a network of local offices. FIA programs include temporary cash assistance, food assistance, child care, child support enforcement, medical assistance, adoption and foster care services, domestic violence services, juvenile justice services and adult and children's protective services. Before her appointment as FIA director, Udow served as Senior Vice President of Health Care Products and Provider Services for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan.

Udow, who holds a master's degree in Health Services Administration from the University of Michigan School of Public Health, is chair of the Michigan Health and Safety Coalition; chair of the Michigan Women's Foundation; past chair of the executive council of the Ready to Succeed Initiative; an inaugural member of the National Advisory Board for the University of Michigan Depression Center; and a member of many other child welfare and community health organizations. In April 2000, she was honored by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) with its Women of Achievement Award. Udow was selected by *Crain's Detroit Business* as one of "Detroit's 100 Most Influential Women" in 2002, and has received the "2003 Lifeline Award" from the Wayne State University College of Nursing.

RANDALL J. WILGER

Randall J. Wilger is Special Assistant to the Chief Justice for Volunteerism. He is program manager of the Children's Community Support Network (CCSN) Project, an initiative of the Michigan Supreme Court. In March 2004, he resigned as a citizen volunteer with the Wayne County Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) after twelve years. Concurrent with his service in Wayne County, he also served as a representative to the state-wide FCRB Advisory Committee. Wilger was chairperson of the Advisory Committee from 1998 – 2004. As the previous past chair, he continues to serve as a member of the FCRB Executive Committee.

Wilger received a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor in 1985. He also holds a B.S. degree in Business Administration from Wayne State University in Detroit. He serves as chairperson for the Finance Committee and is a member of the Board of Directors of CareGivers, a non-profit social service agency providing care for families, seniors, and homeless in Detroit and the surrounding communities.